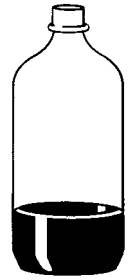




Plastic Plastic Plastic



In Branford, only the cloudy #2 plastics – milk jugs – get recycled.

Not #1's like soda or clear juice bottles; not colored #2's like laundry detergent bottles.

OK, let's talk about it.

Why don't we recycle more plastic in Branford – at least all #1's and the rest of the #2's?
Isn't more recycling always better?

There are both economic and environmental reasons why we don't recycle the other plastics. I've always tried to have a viable, rational, long-term program – not feel-good solutions. First of all, our garbage doesn't go to a landfill to be buried; it goes to a waste-to-energy plant (in Bristol, CT) to be burned to make electricity. So the volume filling up landfills is no longer an issue, and it does get one more use – namely the fuel value of the plastic – though that's admittedly not as good as a proper cycle. We pay to get rid of our garbage by weight, but plastic weighs almost nothing, so if we took it out of the garbage, we wouldn't save any noticeable money. But if we put it in the recycling, now we're back to volume – in your box, the collection truck, and the large roll-off truck that takes the mixed bottles and cans to the sorting facility in Groton, an hour away. And most of that volume is air, not plastic. Adding the milk jugs and cartons in 1992 increased our weight – the amount of “stuff” – by only 3%, but our volume by 31%, and our price by 19%. Since only about ¼ of the plastic containers in the U.S. are milk jugs, if we added the clear and colored, we could expect to see the efficiency drop even further – to a point where recycling bottles/cans/plastic might cost as much or more than disposing of garbage. \$\$\$

But it's not just about money. If we were saving the environment wouldn't that make up for the extra cost? Maybe, but I think more plastics recycling would hurt the environment. Why? Because we have to get the plastics from your house to a plastics factory. We recycle to conserve all natural resources, right? With our markets where they are, it is my educated guess that we would burn more energy in gasoline to drive all that air in the bottles around town and across the state than we would save from recycling the plastic for another use. It's not worth it.

